

we had never given a posthumous pardon before. But the Defense Department and I very much wanted to do it.

We gave the fourth star to Benjamin O. Davis not very long ago in tribute to the Tuskegee Airmen. I think that looking backward is really a way of—in this context—is a way of ensuring you'll continue to go forward. It's a way of reminding us how far we've come and what we missed when we deny any group of people who wanted to contribute to our military the chance to do so. And I hope that this forward movement will continue.

I mean, there will always be controversies around the edges, rules to be worked out, difficulties to be dealt with, but when you give patriotic Americans who want to serve and who can serve well, the chance to do it, you win.

**Mrs. Cohen.** Sir, if I may I ask you a personal question, you have been a champion of diversity, you have always defended and stood up for the underdog, whether it's gender, whether it's race, whether it's age, whether even it's orientation. Where does that come from?

**The President.** I think two things in my long-ago past. First of all, with regard to women, my mother was widowed when I was born, and she was off studying to be a nurse. My grandparents raised me until I was 4. My grandmother worked, as well as my grandfather; my grandmother was a nurse. So I had always been around women who had to work to make a contribution to their family's welfare. And so I think from early childhood I always was particularly sensitive to any kind of discrimination against women or just denial of opportunity. And I was always sort of rooting for them because of my mother and my grandmother.

And on the race thing, I think it was because of my grandfather and the fact that when I was a child he had a little grocery store in a predominantly black area of this little town we lived in. Most of the customers were black. And most of what I learned about people and human nature and treating everybody the same and also discrimination, I learned as a little boy just listening and watching and observing and being taught.

So, in a funny way, most southerners were at a—most white southerners were at a disadvantage in dealing with the civil rights revolution because they were raised with more explicit racial prejudice. But some of us were actually at an advantage because we had more human contact with African-Americans before others did, and if we were lucky enough to have parents or grandparents that taught us differently, I think it made a difference.

So I think those two things, you know, and just in my family—we always had sympathy for the underdog, too. We never believed it was right to keep anybody down. And we were all raised, all of us, never to build ourselves up because there was somebody else we could look down on.

And I think that's—if you think about it, if you generalize that, really that psychological problem is at the bottom of a lot of this racial and ethnic hatred around the world. A lot of these groups themselves are deprived of opportunity. They've had economic adversity, had all kinds of diversity, and a lot of them, frankly are taught as groups that what gives meaning to their lives is that they're not a member of this other group; at least they've got somebody to look down on. And I just thank the Lord nearly every day that I was—it didn't have anything to do with me—I was lucky enough to have grandparents and a mother, a family situation where I was taught differently.

**Mrs. Cohen.** Well, we're lucky that we have a President who feels that way.

**The President.** Thank you. Thank you, Janet.

NOTE: The interview began at 11:10 a.m. on February 25 aboard Air Force One en route to Tucson, AZ, but was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 4. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

## Remarks on the 150th Anniversary of the Department of the Interior

March 4, 1999

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, it's wonderful to be here today. I want to thank the Great American Indian Dancers.

I got to watch on the screen, off the stage, and I thought they were wonderful. And I want to thank Dagmar and Mark for their presentations and for the employees they represent.

Mark, that was a pretty shameless pander to Bruce Babbitt, though. *[Laughter]* If that doesn't get you a raise, nothing will. *[Laughter]*

And I would like to say Secretary Babbitt has spent a lot of his time putting out fires, both figuratively and literally, some of which I lit. *[Laughter]* And I thank him for that and for his remarkable loyalty to this department. I got kind of tickled when he said that talking to one of you reminded him of drinking water from a fire hydrant. Sometimes I feel like the fire hydrant looking at a pack of dogs. *[Laughter]*

For 6 years I have declined to tell these kinds of jokes because I have been told repeatedly it is not Presidential. *[Laughter]* But I feel kind of outdoorsy today, you know. *[Laughter]*

I would like to also say to all of you, I really appreciated the Secretary both featuring these two fine employees and talking about the other appointees. I know we have some previous administration appointees who have left to go on to other things here in the audience. I thank all of you who have served by my appointment and all of you who serve by choice in this department.

#### ***Death of Justice Harry A. Blackmun***

I have some remarks to make, but I hope that you will forgive me if I mention a few words about a great American citizen who deeply loved the natural beauty of his native Minnesota. Justice Harry Blackmun died this morning, at the age of 90. In 24 years on the Supreme Court, he served with compassion, distinction, and honor. Every decision and every dissent was firmly grounded in the Constitution he revered, and his uncanny feel for the human element that lies just beneath the surface of all serious legal argument.

You can see his mind and heart at work in the landmark decision he wrote protecting women's rights to reproductive freedom, and in his decisions to make the promise of civil rights actually come alive in the daily existence of the American people.

Hillary and I were deeply privileged to know Justice Blackmun and his wonderful wife of 58 years, Dottie, for quite a long while. I saw up close Harry Blackmun's intense passion—his passion for the welfare of the American people, for defending our liberties and our institutions, for moving us forward together. We send our respect and our prayers to Dottie and to his three daughters.

To the millions of Americans whose voices he heard and whose rights he defended, to the countless numbers of us who knew and loved him, Harry Blackmun's life embodied the admonition of the prophet, Micah: He did justice, and he loved mercy. And now, he walks humbly with his God. Thank you very much.

#### ***150th Anniversary***

Now, let me say that I've been wanting to come over here to thank you for a long time. I don't know that there has ever been a President who has benefited more, in personal ways at important times of his life, from the Department of the Interior. I was raised in Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, the first city in America to contain a national park. I spent my first 18 years in a state that is more than half-covered with pine and hardwood forests, which is why Mike Gaudin had a little trouble appreciating Arizona. *[Laughter]*

When I finished law school, I went home to the hills of northwest Arkansas and spent some of the happiest days of my life on the Buffalo River, the very first river set aside under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Today, my family and I have the great honor of living in the most beautiful home under the care of the National Park System. Sometimes it feels more like a zoo than a park, but I love it. Now, my lease is up in one year, 10 months, and 16 days—*[laughter]*—but who's counting? *[Laughter]*

Perhaps more than any other department of the Federal Government, the Interior Department really does embody the history of our country: The story of manifest destiny and the great western expansion; the story of fertile fields rising from arid desert; of people rising from the depths of the Great

Depression; or the nation marshaling the resources to win two World Wars; a story of scientific discovery and relentless exploration; a story of our country's struggles to recognize the dignity and independence and sovereignty, and expand the opportunity of our first citizens, our Native Americans; a story of the efforts of this country to expand the horizons and make real the promise of America for all Americans, as Secretary Harold Ickes did when he invited the incomparable Marian Anderson to sing from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial 60 years ago, in 1939. Most of all, as Secretary Babbitt has proved every day, it is the story of our intensifying determination as a people to conserve and restore our precious natural resources.

In 1849, when this Department was launched, with a headquarter staff of 10, and a budget of \$14,200, it lacked a unifying purpose—hard to imagine you could do much more than one thing with that kind of money. [Laughter] Today, with a much larger staff and a considerably larger budget, the contrast is remarkable.

Under Bruce Babbitt's leadership, everything this department does is guided by the unifying purpose of stewardship. As wise and dedicated stewards, you act in the recognition that all of us are but brief visitors on this small planet. You understand that everything we want for our children depends on protecting the forests, the streams, the deserts that were here so very long before we came along. Today, the "Department of Everything Else," as it was once called, is and forever will be the "Department of Stewardship." And for that, I thank you all.

Using a skillful touch, but not a heavy hand, you have achieved remarkable things. Many have been mentioned today, but because they're so important to me, I want to thank you personally for them. Three years ago, we set out on a mission to preserve California's Headwaters Forest, the world's largest unprotected stand of old-growth redwoods. Three days ago, you did it. We did it. And aren't we glad?

Thanks to the tireless efforts of so many people here and at your sister agency, NOAA, not one of the magnificent trees of Headwaters Forest will ever be logged. Any one who has ever strolled through a grove

of redwoods—and I have—who have seen the tangle of ferns at your feet and the living canopy reaching high overhead, knows that these ancient forests are as much a part of our legacy, as I said, as the world's great cathedrals. Thank you for making them safe for all time.

We should also be proud that over the last 6 years we've set aside vast unspoiled areas of the Mojave Desert, designating three new national parks. We put a stop to a massive mining operation that threatened Yellowstone, the world's first national park. To protect Utah's stunning red rock canyons, we created the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and completed the largest land exchange in the continental United States.

And I have to tell you, I just returned from Utah, where the rest of my family went skiing, and I thought about it. [Laughter] And I was so pleased that any number of people, after all the flak we took—any number of people came up to me, just on the street, and said, "Mr. President, you might have been right about that. I think this is going to work out fine, and I'm glad we saved that land."

And in a project that has been particularly close to my heart because I have also been there, we are restoring the Florida Everglades, the largest restoration project ever undertaken in our Nation's history.

That is quite a legacy. But we have much, much more to do. This year, the last of this century, we must dedicate ourselves not to resting on these accomplishments but to building on them.

First, we must preserve more precious lands. I will soon send the Congress a plan to bestow the highest level of wilderness protection on more than 5 million acres of backcountry lands within Yellowstone, Glacier, and other national parks. In these vast regions, the roar of bulldozers and chainsaws never again will drown out the call of the wild.

I'm also proposing an unprecedented \$1 billion Lands Legacy Initiative, which Secretary Babbitt mentioned, on which many of you worked. It will allow us to continue your efforts to protect natural and historic lands

across our Nation, such as Civil War battlefields, remote stretches of the historic Lewis and Clark trail, and an additional 450,000 acres in and around Mojave and Joshua Tree National Parks.

It will also allow us to meet the stewardship challenges of a new century. It is no longer enough for our Nation to preserve its grandest natural wonders. As communities grow and expand, it has become every bit as important to preserve the small but sacred green and open space closer to home. So my Lands Legacy Initiative will also help communities protect meadows and seashores, where children play; streams where sportsmen and women can fish; farmlands that produce the fresh harvest we often take for granted.

We believe this Lands Legacy Initiative must be a permanent legacy. So today I promise to work with Congress to create for the very first time a guaranteed fund for protecting and restoring priceless land all across America.

There are many good legislative ideas for achieving this goal. We think any solution must provide at least \$1 billion annually, with at least half dedicated to helping communities protect local green spaces. It also must recognize the unique environmental challenges of coastal States, without creating any new incentives for offshore oil drilling. Working together, we can ensure that not only our generation, but each generation to come, will have the resources to leave an even better land for those who follow.

Second, as we help preserve more open spaces, we have a great opportunity to help create more livable communities, healthy communities where people don't have to waste a gallon of gasoline driving to get a gallon of milk, where employers have no trouble recruiting workers interested in a high quality of life. The Vice President and I have proposed record funding for public transit and Better American bonds to help communities grow in ways that ensure a clean environment and strong, sustainable economic development.

Third, we must clean up the 40 percent of our waterways that still are too polluted for fishing and swimming. Most Americans don't know that, and many are surprised to

hear it. I call on Congress to fully fund my clean water action plan and to reauthorize and strengthen the Clean Water Act.

Fourth, we must do more to meet our most profound, common global environmental challenge, the challenge of global warming. I have proposed a clean air partnership fund to help communities reduce both greenhouse pollution and smog, as well as tax and research incentives to spur clean energy technologies. I want to work with Members of Congress in both parties to reward companies that take early, voluntary action to reduce greenhouse gases.

Let me say just one thing here that's not in the script. A lot of you clapped, and a lot of you were smiling when I said I'd been to Utah, and people came up to me and said, this Grand Staircase idea wasn't such a bad idea, after all. And you nodded your head because you knew it all along. One of the biggest impediments to human progress in any free society is the persistence, buried deep in the brains of the people at large or people in decisionmaking positions, of old ideas that aren't right any longer. The biggest impediment we have to dealing with the challenge of climate change is not cheap oil. It is the old idea that we simply cannot have economic growth without industrial age patterns of energy use.

And I see it all over the world. I see it here in the United States. I see it in the United States Congress, where one subcommittee forced us to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars last year trying to defend our climate change plan, which had no new taxes, no big new regulations, was solely devoted to tax incentives, and new research and development for new technologies.

Now, the fact is that things we do today to reduce greenhouse gas pollution—with available technologies, not to mention those that are just ahead and almost within our reach—will lower greenhouse gas emissions, will reduce the threat of global warming, and will create more jobs at higher incomes. The old idea is wrong. I ask the employees of the Interior Department to help the American people get rid of an old, wrong idea, so that we can do this.

These are the things that we have to do: setting aside more lands; making more livable

communities; cleaning up our waterways; dealing with the challenge of climate change. We can do it. I say to the Members of Congress in both parties, please join this crusade. I say to the majority party, the preservation of our natural resources, the stewardship of this great land, should not be a partisan issue.

This country never had a better conservation President than Theodore Roosevelt. For 12 years, I was a Governor. The first Governors' Conference in history was called by Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 to talk about conservation of our resources.

When I was out in Utah, I was looking through Roosevelt's four-volume history of the American West, and thinking to myself, why don't we have two parties equally committed to fulfilling his vision? So I implore the Congress: Let us not waste precious time battling over these bad antienvironmental riders, which I am going to veto anyway; instead, let's go on with the work of America.

Let me say in closing one very personal thing. As I have already explained, I am as deeply indebted to the work of the Department of the Interior as any President could possibly be—to the visionaries like John Wesley Powell and Harold Ickes and Rachel Carson, to the park rangers that I've seen in Yellowstone and Grand Teton and other parks, to the people that were kind to me as a boy when I roamed the trails and the mountains of the national park which was my home.

In one way or the other, almost all of us have come to see nature as a precious but fragile gift and an important part of the fabric of our lives. Probably every one of us could cite one particular example where that came home to us as never before. I remember once in 1971, when I was driving to California to visit Hillary—we had just started seeing each other—and I stopped at the Grand Canyon. And I crawled out on a ledge, about an hour-and-a-half or two before sunset, and I just sat there for 2 hours, and I watched the sun set on Grand Canyon. If you've never done it, you ought to do it. And because of the way the rocks are layered over millions of years, it's like a kaleidoscope. And the colors change over and over and over again, layer by layer by layer as the sun goes down. It is a stunning, stunning thing to see the inter-

play of light and stone and realize how it happened over the ages. I never got over it. I think about it all the time, now, nearly 30 years later.

That kind of moment can't be captured in the words I have shared with you, or even photographed, because the important thing is the interaction of human nature with nature. But we've all felt it. And we all know that part of our essential humanity is paying respect to what God gave us and what will be here a long time after we're gone.

That is what the Interior Department means to me. And after 150 years, it's what it means to all of America's past, and to America's great future.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:50 p.m. in the Sidney B. Yates Auditorium at the Department of Interior. In his remarks, he referred to Interior Department employees Dagmar C. Fertl and Mark Oliver, winners of the Unsung Hero Award.

## **Statement on the National Assessment of Education Progress**

*March 4, 1999*

Today's release of State-by-State National Assessment of Education Progress scores is evidence that our efforts to raise academic standards have begun to pay off. Many States have shown significant improvement in reading in the last 4 years, and some States that had scores well below the national average have made the greatest gains. But much remains to be done to ensure that every child in America is mastering the basics. That is why I urge the Senate to vote this week to continue funding for 100,000 new, well-prepared teachers to reduce class size in the early grades. Parents and teachers across the country know that smaller classes lead to improved student performance in reading and other basic skills. We should grasp this opportunity to build on the gains we have made, so that every child in America is prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century.